Ervin Is Hopeful On Papers Dispute

By Peter Osnos 2/14/73

By a Washington Post Staff Writer

Watergate committee chairman Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. said yesterday that the committee's dispute with President Nixon over access to White House documents could be easily resolved with "a little cooperation."

"I think the matter could be worked out very simply," Ervin said in an interview on the NBC "Today" show, "by having some representative of the White House and some representative of the committee to go through the documents and separate the documents that the committee is entitled to receive and use from the other documents and then let the committee use those documents which are relevant to the matters that the committee is authorized to investigate.

"I see no great difficulty with a little cooperation," he said.

Ervin's position, while outwardly conciliatory, is still directly opposite from the one put forward by the White House that the committee will not have any access to the presidential papers dealing with the Watergate affair and that the President will not appear before the panel.

No date has been set for the private meeting between Mr. Nixon and Ervin that was agreed upon in principle Thursday. White House press secretary Ronald Ziegler said there definitely will be no meeting while Mr. Nixon is in the hospital.

Ervin said yesterday that he had no idea when the meeting might be held.

The White House has described the session as a "matter of courtesy" to Ervin, but the senator said yesterday that that was only "a statement by the press agent of the White House . . ."

"The press agents of the White House have made many statements which they themselves later declared to be 'inoperative,'" Ervin added. "The President took the position originally that under his claim of executive privilege that no aide or former aide to the White House could be compelled to appear before the committee. He changed his mind on that. And I hope that on receipt of further information . . . the President will become wider . . . than his press secretary said he was (Thursday)."